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SUBJECT: EMBASSY MINSK SUBMISSION FOR THE EIGHTH ANNUAL TRAFFICKING
IN PERSONS (TIP) REPORT

REF: STATE 2731

¶1. (U) This is Embassy Minsk's submission for the eighth annual TIP report. Responses are keyed to reftel.

¶2. (SBU) This report identifies anti-TIP NGOs and international organizations by name. However, for security reasons, post requests that the Department protect their identity and not publicly disclose them.

¶27. OVERVIEW

-- A. (SBU) Belarus is a country of origin and transit for internationally trafficked persons, particularly women. However, the trafficking of male victims to Russia for labor continues to be a problem. For 2007, the Ministry of Interior reported 84 cases of trafficking in persons. Authorities also registered approximately 418 trafficking victims, of whom 378 were trafficked for sexual exploitation (including 22 minors) and 40 for labor exploitation (including one minor).

-- (SBU) In 2007, the Minsk office of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) assisted 184 victims of trafficking, including 31 men and 5 minors. Of the victims IOM assisted, 134 suffered sexual exploitation at their destination point compared to 187 in 2006, while 47 were forced to perform manual labor as compared to 229 last year.

-- (SBU) There were no territories in Belarus outside of the government's control.

-- (SBU) Reliable sources of information in Belarus on trafficking in persons include the Ministry of Interior (MOI), the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare, IOM, the Young Women's Christian Association of Belarus (BYWCA)/La Strada, the Belarusian Red Cross, the Business Women's Association, and the Women's Crisis Center Radislava.

-- (SBU) BYWCA/La Strada, an NGO that plays a significant role in Belarus in trafficking prevention and victim assistance, and IOM reported that there were a handful of cases of trafficking in persons within Belarus where women were trafficked from the regions to Minsk for sexual exploitation. In August 2007, police filed charges against nine people for running a brothel in Minsk where the workers, all women from the regions, received only food and clothes as compensation.

-- B. (SBU) According to the MOI and IOM, Belarusian single, unemployed women between the ages 18-30 were most at risk of being trafficked. Most female victims of trafficking are seeking a way to escape bad economic circumstances or domestic situations. Local NGOs assert that more government intervention against the related problems of domestic violence and alcoholism would greatly reduce the number of women seeking employment abroad. Of the victims IOM assisted in 2007, 42 percent were between the ages of 18 and 24, and 34 percent were between ages 25 and 30. In addition, traffickers have continued to target males of all ages for forced manual labor, primarily in Russia. IOM statistics reported that a vast majority of victims would be considered poor by GOB standards.

-- (SBU) Traffickers often use land crossings with Ukraine, Poland, and Lithuania. The GOB has made efforts to tighten borders and train border guards to monitor and prevent TIP-related border crossings. Traffickers increasingly opted to send more victims through Russia, both because of the open border there, and because the EU has implemented stricter visa requirements. According to La Strada, trafficking victims primarily exit Belarus on legal documents and valid tourist visas, making it extremely difficult to identify victims. Traffickers sometimes falsified a variety of

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documents to move victims including passports, training certificates, and government stamps and seals.

-- (SBU) Reports from the IOM indicate victims were mainly trafficked to European Union countries (particularly Germany, Poland, the Czech Republic, Lithuania, and Cyprus), the Middle East (particularly Israel and the United Arab Emirates), Turkey, Russia, Ukraine, and Japan. Trafficking to Russia presents a particular problem because of its open border. Although primarily a country of origin, its central location also makes Belarus a country of transit to eastern and western destinations.

-- (SBU) Ministry of Interior reports indicated that traffickers were members of loosely organized crime networks with connections to larger international organized crime rings, brothels, clubs, or bars in destination countries. Traffickers lured victims through advertisements, modeling and employment agencies, and personal approaches through friends and relatives, offering jobs abroad and soliciting marriage partners. Traffickers often withheld victims' documents and used physical and emotional abuse, fraud, and coercion to control victims. In January 2007 authorities charged 13 executives of Belarusian modeling agencies with trafficking more than 600 women for prostitution in France, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates between 2002 and 2005. La Strada added that traffickers were often Belarusian citizens living abroad with business ties to their home country.

-- (SBU) The GOB has shown initiative in training officers to fight TIP more effectively and assist victims. The Ministry of Interior's new Anti-TIP Training Academy at the National Police Academy graduated its first class of trainees in July 2007, and is currently training at least one TIP specialist for each of the 156 police districts throughout the country. These TIP specialists are trained in law-enforcement, victim assistance and protection.

-- (SBU) As part of an effort to restrict common channels of trafficking, in March 2005 the GOB introduced stricter controls on modeling, employment, and marriage agencies. As a result traffickers began to rely more on informal recruitment networks to approach potential victims personally to lure women and men with false promises of lucrative financial opportunities abroad. Most recruiters were acquaintances or a friend of a friend of the victim.

According to IOM and La Strada, traffickers usually approach potential victims at bars or discos for sexual exploitation work or use advertisements for construction sites to lure victims for labor exploitation. IOM reported that about three fourths of their victims were approached personally by a trafficker.

-- (SBU) The National Assembly adopted a series of amendments to its anti-trafficking legislation in December 2005. The amendments require permission from the Ministry of Education (MOE) to study abroad for more than 30 days, require any entity distributing personal information online -- including Internet dating and employment agencies -- to both reregister with the government and to submit all information about Belarusians and foreigners who utilize their services. La Strada has expressed concerns that the Lukashenko regime is using the TIP issue as a means to further restrict Belarusians from traveling abroad for legitimate purposes.

-- C. (SBU) In 2005, the Government created a new office within the Ministry of the Interior, the Department on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, to take the lead in its anti-TIP efforts. Other government agencies involved in anti-trafficking activities include: the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare, the Ministry of Information, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Culture, the State Security Committee (Belarusian KGB), and the State Border Committee. NGOs are generally more active in prevention and rehabilitation. Government sources stated that victims were more likely to trust

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NGOs than government sources of assistance.

-- D. (SBU) The Belarusian government has demonstrated a noticeable increase in political will to combat trafficking and has used its efforts to combat TIP to establish itself as a responsible member of the international anti-TIP community and to raise its international profile. However, limited governmental resources hamper anti-TIP efforts. The Ministry of Interior has acknowledged the need for law enforcement agencies, courts, and the Prosecutor General's Office to organize specialized training for staff in victim identification, protection, communication and referral to relevant social services. The MOI has increased its training resources and has made a concerted effort to improve anti-TIP training for members of law enforcement. However, the high turnover rate for law enforcement officials continues to put a strain on training programs. Lack of coordination among government departments and bureaucratic red tape continue to hinder Belarus' ability to address the problem, though this issue is slated to be addressed during the government's new 2008-2010 anti-TIP action plan. Overall corruption is not a problem related to anti-TIP efforts.

-- (SBU) IOM and La Strada noted that while the GOB opens many investigations into TIP cases, the prosecution rate remains low. The organizations attribute this discrepancy to lack of devoted anti-TIP personnel and the difficulty of collecting evidence for prosecution. The GOB is addressing this problem through the Interior Ministry's plan to train TIP specialists for each police jurisdiction in the country at the new anti-TIP Academy.

-- (SBU) Ministries and government agencies allow anti-TIP international organizations and NGOs to operate with little interference, and delays in project registration have been significantly reduced in the past year. The government makes mostly in-kind contributions to the activities of these organizations such as personnel, technical and administrative support, and assistance with transportation, lodging or conference space, and allows the NGO Radislava to operate a small anti-TIP shelter in a government building free of charge. The MOI continues to devote significant human and material resources to investigation and detection efforts as well as to provide representatives to participate in NGO-sponsored victim assistance training seminars as guest speakers or presenters.

-- (SBU) According to the MOI, the government lacks the resources to aid victims, particularly funds for victim repatriation. The Government is seeking assistance from international organizations

and foreign nations to return victims to Belarus. IOM is attempting to expand their victim repatriation program, primarily through funding from the Danish government and PRM, to meet this need. Given the lack of financial resources to address all the new anti-TIP initiatives, the GOB relies on its partnerships with NGOs and international organizations to implement new regulations. However, the GOB has taken the initiative in developing its own training resources for ministry and law enforcement officials at its Anti-TIP Training Center.

-- E. (SBU) The single point of contact for all anti-trafficking efforts government-wide is the head of the MOI's Department on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings. All ministries involved in anti-TIP efforts report to this Department on a monthly basis for evaluation. Every six months the Department itself submits a status report directly to the Presidential Administration. In May 2006, the GOB requested a third-party assessment of its anti-TIP efforts to be performed by IOM and Red Cross main offices.

128. INVESTIGATION AND PROSECUTION OF TRAFFICKERS

-- A. (SBU) Belarusian law prohibits all forms of trafficking in persons and criminalizes trafficking in persons for sexual or other

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kinds of exploitation. Article 181 of the criminal code, which entered into force in 2001 and was amended in 2005, penalizes trafficking in persons for the purposes of sexual or other kinds of exploitation, including labor exploitation. Other laws which pertain to trafficking in persons include: Article 18, organized crime; Article 167, sexual assault; Article 170, forcing sexual actions; Article 171, pimping and operating a brothel for the purpose of prostitution; Article 173, involving minors in anti-social behavior (including prostitution); Article 182, kidnapping human beings for the purpose of exploitation; Article 187 (amended in 2005), recruitment of human beings for the purpose of exploitation. A March 2005 presidential decree allows the confiscation of property of convicted traffickers and increased prison sentences. The penalty for trafficking is a minimum of five years imprisonment with property forfeiture, while the punishment for severe forms of trafficking is a minimum of 12 years imprisonment with forfeiture. These laws taken together appear to be adequate to cover the full scope of TIP.

-- (SBU) Based on the recommendations from a series of UNDP conferences aimed at improving Belarus' anti-trafficking legislation, President Lukashenko issued Decree No. 3 "On Some Measures to Combat TIP," which raised the punishment for trafficking via amendments to Articles 171, 181, 182, and 187 of the Criminal Code. Although many of the possible penalties remain the same, amendments to the criminal code made after this decree ensure that those convicted of trafficking receive longer sentences than they would have prior to the decree. The decree also amended the law to comply with the Palermo Protocol which mandates that trafficking victims are not to be held responsible for illegal acts committed while a victim and enables the government to confiscate the property of convicted traffickers.

-- (SBU) Legal experts noted that prosecutions under the original language of Article 181 were hindered by legally referring to the victim as a "dependent person." This allowed defense lawyers to challenge the extent of dependency, causing cases to be prosecuted under the less effective Article 171 (pimping and operating a brothel) instead. The GOB subsequently modified the decree to broaden the language to include any person being exploited, thus enabling investigators and prosecutors to build stronger cases against traffickers and increase the number of convictions made under Belarus' trafficking law.

-- (SBU) Even though prosecutors and law enforcement officials use Article 181, many trafficking investigations were still opened under Articles 187, 171, 182, and 173. Similarly, convicted traffickers were sentenced under these articles. However, prosecutors and judges were becoming more familiar with Article 181; training by IOM, MOI officials, and UNDP improved the judiciary's ability to use

Article 181 effectively.

-- B. (SBU) Penalties for traffickers increased under the amendments to the criminal code brought about by Decree No. 3 "On Some Measures to Combat Trafficking in Persons." The penalty for trafficking is now a minimum of five to seven years of imprisonment with forfeiture of property (previously three to six years with or without property forfeiture). If the crime was premeditated, committed intentionally against a minor, involved two or more victims, was done for the purpose of sexual exploitation or any other kind of exploitation, involved the sale of organ tissue, or involved organized crime, the penalty is now a minimum of ten to twelve years of imprisonment with forfeiture of property (previously five to ten years with or without property forfeiture). If the crime involved the unintentional death of the victim, or caused severe injury to the victim, the penalty is twelve to fifteen years of imprisonment with forfeiture of property (previously eight to fifteen with or without property forfeiture).

-- C. The law does not specifically mention labor exploitation.

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However, Ayr 3nalizes recruitment of human beings for the purpose of exploitation. The word "exploitation" in each of the above articles is assumed to include both sexual and labor exploitation. The GOB has already started to convict labor traffickers under these articles.

-- D. (SBU) The maximum penalty for rape or forcible sexual assault is 15 years imprisonment. The maximum penalty for severe forms of trafficking is 15 years imprisonment with property confiscation.

-- E. (SBU) Prostitution is illegal in Belarus under Article 162 of Belarus' administrative code. The administrative penalties for prostitution are a written warning or small fine. Pimps and brothel owners may be held liable under Article 171 of Belarus' criminal code. The penalties for pimping or operating a brothel for the purpose of prostitution are a fine, arrest of up to six months, restricted freedom up to three years, or imprisonment for up to five years. Clients of prostitutes are not liable under Belarus' criminal or administrative laws. Amendments to the Criminal Code added a new provision to Article 171, which describes the penalties for pimping or operating a brothel in connection with transporting someone abroad for prostitution. If the above acts are done by a governmental official abusing authority, by an organized group, by a person charged with offences stipulated in Articles 171 or 181, or using a minor for prostitution, the penalty is imprisonment from 7 to 10 years with property confiscation.

-- F. (SBU) According to Ministry of the Interior data, in 2007 authorities registered 441 "trafficking in persons" crimes, including 162 serious ones. Of those, 188 cases involved transporting 338 victims abroad for the purpose of exploitation. There were 26 cases of labor exploitation involving 40 victims, one of which was a minor. According to Ministry of Justice statistics, 188 people were convicted of various TIP-related offences in 2007, 89 of which were sentenced to prison.

-- (SBU) In September 2007 a court in Vitebsk sentenced five traffickers who together recruited 28 young women from the region for sexual exploitation in Moscow to three to five years imprisonment. In August Belarusian authorities filed an extradition request for a Belarusian woman living in Kyiv who was suspected of recruiting more than 400 women for brothels there.

-- (SBU) The MOI provided the following breakdown of the number of trafficking related crimes for 2007: pimping, maintaining brothels, prostitution (article 171) - 168 cases; involving minors in antisocial behavior (art. 173) - 45 cases; trafficking in persons (art. 181) - 84 cases; kidnapping human beings for the purpose of exploitation (art. 182) 8 cases; recruiting human beings for the purpose of exploitation (art. 187) 4 cases.

-- (SBU) Due to amendments to the criminal code that came into effect in May 2005 under the law "On introducing changes and amendments to some codes of the Republic of Belarus on the issues of

reinforcing liability for TIP and other related offences," trafficking crimes were charged under either the new or old penal code depending on when they occurred.

-- G. (SBU) With the opening of the Ministry of Interior sponsored International Anti-TIP Academy at the National Police Academy, the GOB has shown initiative in training officers to fight TIP more effectively and assist victims. The Academy graduated its first class of trainees in July 2007, and is currently training at least one TIP specialist for each of the 156 police districts throughout the country in law-enforcement, victim assistance and protection. The MOI also plans to host training for law enforcement officials from CIS countries, and is planning an Arabic-language curriculum

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for training with officers from the Gulf States. The Ministry of Interior invested USD 149,000 in the facility, financing 90 percent of its startup costs. Partial funding was provided by IOM, and training materials were developed in conjunction with La Strada. In 2007, the academy completed training for four groups of officers from several CIS countries, and is planning at least four more similar courses for international officers for 2008 in addition to continuing education programs for local officers.

--H. (SBU) The MOI reported that Belarusian law enforcement officials have established direct TIP enforcement contacts with their counterparts in the main destination countries - Russia, Ukraine, Spain, Poland, Lithuania, the United Kingdom, Netherlands, Germany, Austria, Israel, and Turkey. Belarusian law enforcement officials actively investigated cases of trafficking throughout the year and worked jointly with officials abroad to break up several trafficking rings.

-- (SBU) In an investigation that concluded in April 2007, Belarusian police worked closely with German and Spanish authorities to shut down a trafficking ring based in Barcelona that trafficked Belarusian women to Czech Republic, Germany, Canada, and Israel. The Ministry of Interior worked closely with Lithuanian authorities to capture 19 members of a ring that trafficked Belarusian women for sexual exploitation in Vilnius.

-- (SBU) Belarus has ratified the following agreements: ILO Convention 182, ratified in July 2000 and implemented in October 2001; ILO Conventions 29 and 105, ratified as of January 2000; the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution, and Child Pornography, acceded January 2002; the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the UN Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime (Palermo Protocol), ratified 3 May 2003.

-- I. (SBU) According to Article 7 of the criminal code, Belarusian citizens cannot be extradited to a foreign country if provision for such action is not covered by an international agreement with the Republic of Belarus. Foreign nationals residing in Belarus can be extradited to a requesting state in accordance with international agreements with the Republic of Belarus. If no agreement exists between the Republic of Belarus and the requesting state, a foreign national can be extradited on the basis of reciprocity. Belarus ratified the Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime that provides a legal basis for cooperation in extradition with other states that are parties to the Convention.

-- J. (SBU) There were no indications of government involvement in or tolerance of trafficking on a local or institutional level.

-- K. (SBU) There were no indications that government officials were involved in trafficking.

-- L. (SBU) Belarus does not contribute troops to peacekeeping efforts and therefore there have been no cases of military personnel engaging in trafficking abroad.

-- M. (SBU) Belarus does not have an identified child sex tourism problem either as a source or as a destination. Belarus acceded to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child

on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution, and Child Pornography on January 2002. Presidential Decree No. 3 "On Some Measures to Combat Trafficking in Persons" criminalized child pornography distribution. "Manufacturing or storage with the purpose of distribution or advertising" of child pornography is punishable by one to three years imprisonment for an individual or two to four years by a group of people or an organization.

129. PROTECTION AND ASSISTANCE TO VICTIMS

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-- A. (SBU) The August 2005 anti-TIP decree defines the status of trafficking victims and enumerates the services that they should be provided. The edict ensures victims' safety, social security and rehabilitation care, and requires Belarusian diplomatic missions and consular sections abroad to render necessary assistance to victims. Social security and rehabilitation services are granted to the victims free of charge, and include providing victims temporary room and board, providing free legal assistance, and arranging medical and psychological care by state-run medical institutions. Full-time employment assistance will also be offered. The GOB uses its partnerships with NGOs and international organizations to provide many of the above services.

-- (SBU) The 2005 decree mandates reimbursement by the offender/trafficker, enforceable in a court of law, of all costs incurred by the state in helping TIP victims. Local governments and administrative agencies, district centers of social services, children's social shelters, and prosecutors all have the right to demand such reimbursement through the courts. However, La Strada has noted that the procedure is complicated and burdensome. To address this, the new 2008-2010 plan includes the possibility of reinforcing the reimbursement mechanism by creating a standing victim compensation fund to cover expenses related to repatriation and physical and psychological damage. The fund will be subsidized with assets confiscated from convicted offenders.

-- (SBU) The government does assist foreign trafficking victims, but there have been few to date. The law allows for authorities to grant temporary residency status to foreign victims, though it was found to be necessary to do so only once. In January 2008, immigration officials granted a minor from Ukraine temporary residency status and shelter in Belarus. During the reporting period, other foreign victims have received assistance, though three were Russian citizens and because of standing bilateral immigration agreements with Russia did not need any adjustment in residency status. IOM also assisted two Ukrainian citizens who already had residency status.

-- B. (SBU) The Belarusian Government mandates that victims receive a variety of services. Much of the assistance was provided by IOM, La Strada and the Women's Crisis Center Radislava. According to the MOI, because of budget shortfalls, the GOB looks to NGOs to cover much of the associated costs.

-- (SBU) There were 156 territorial social centers around Belarus, but they do not specialize in trafficking victim assistance. Law enforcement officials generally refer victims to NGO shelters and crisis centers to provide rehabilitation and reintegration services, including the shelters run by IOM, La Strada, Radislava, and a shelter originally established by UNDP. According to La Strada, approximately five or six of the 156 territorial shelters have crisis centers that were ready to accept trafficking victims. The GOB recently acquired the former UNDP shelter when it was transferred to the Minsk City Center for Social Services for Families and Children upon the completion of the UNDP project.

-- (SBU) In 2006, IOM opened a Medical Rehabilitation Shelter that offers medical and psychological assistance to trafficking victims. Radislava and La Strada run mini-shelters for TIP victims. Approximately 30 NGOs render legal, psychological and other assistance. To fund their activities, government facilities and NGOs have the right to sue traffickers for reimbursement.

-- (SBU) There are 136 child social centers where child victims can be sent. In 2007, IOM registered five minors as trafficking victims.

-- (SBU) Victims can independently seek medical assistance,

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including HIV/AIDS testing, through state clinics free of charge under Belarus' system of healthcare, though the centers do not specialize in trafficking victims. Most victims decline to seek medical assistance due to reluctance to divulge information to clinic and hospital staff. Regional social centers and employment offices in theory can also provide social services to returned victims. Financial restraints and a lack of resources and training undermine the government's ability to provide comprehensive care to victims.

-- (SBU) Because of the GOB's increased focus on training, law enforcement officials more frequently referred victims to NGOs in Belarus that can provide medical, shelter and financial assistance. In some cases law enforcement officials provided transportation to and from home to NGOs or to other assistance providers for victims who requested reintegration help.

-- C. (SBU) The GOB increased its in-kind assistance efforts and has made administrative matters significantly easier for anti-TIP NGOs. The NGO Radislava reported receiving a newly-renovated building free of charge with free utilities from the authorities in return for an agreement to open a new shelter for victims of trafficking and domestic violence, and the Red Cross reported receiving favorable leasing terms and pricing for its facilities. Government sources stated that NGOs also receive waivers for customs duties. Most government assistance comes from the federal budget. IOM reported that the GOB provided 20 percent of all conference costs and provides logistical support.

-- D. (SBU) An NGO referral system exists, which IOM established in September 2002. It consists of 21 organizations involved in both prevention and reintegration activities. In 2007, these organizations referred 149 victims to IOM for reintegration assistance. Some NGOs have commented in the past that law enforcement officials have made inaccurate referrals, and recommended additional training for officers to learn how to properly identify and refer victims of trafficking. Authorities are addressing this problem through officer training at the MOI's Anti-TIP Training Academy. Additionally, under the auspices of IOM's memo of understanding with the border guards, IOM will provide seminars and victim identification trainings for government officials.

-- E. (SBU) Not applicable as prostitution in Belarus is illegal.

-- F. (SBU) NGOs in Belarus generally agree that the legal rights of victims are respected. Trafficking victims are not detained or jailed. Belarus ratified the Palermo Protocol in 2003, and follows its policy that states that even if a woman had previously consented to prostitution, she should still be considered a victim. In addition, the August 2005 anti-TIP decree mandates that TIP victims may not be deported or otherwise held administratively accountable for offences committed in connection to TIP crimes against them such as prostitution or immigration violations.

-- G. (SBU) Official policy forbids coercion of victims, and it appears that this is taken seriously by Ministry of Interior leadership, though the policy is still being assimilated by the ranks. Several NGOs have reported an improvement in the area of victim coercion, though there are still reports that pressure to cooperate with investigations does occasionally occur with less experienced officers at the local level. The State Border Committee now allows IOM to take and shelter victims for several days before calling in investigators. The issue of pressuring victims is one area that the TIP Academy emphasizes during its training of local TIP-specialist police officers.

-- H. (SBU) Victims are allowed to file civil suits and/or seek legal action against the traffickers, and both IOM and La Strada

provide legal assistance to victims of trafficking. A

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counter-trafficking manual for law enforcement officials and repeated law enforcement trainings by international organizations and NGOs in Belarus' regional centers have improved law enforcement officers' interviewing skills. Local NGOs still report, however, that victims occasionally encounter judgmental and hostile attitudes from some law enforcement personnel, particularly in smaller cities and towns, though this issue continues to be addressed through further training.

-- (SBU) Part six of Article 168 of the Criminal Code states that where there is reason to believe that a witness, their family members, close relatives, or other persons closely related to the witness have been threatened with murder, violent actions, or destruction of property, the witness' personal data and signature should not be included in the witness report. According to part one of Article 172 and part one of Article 173, upon receipt of information or statements regarding threats made against a witness, the authorities must register, consider, and provide a decision regarding the claim within three days, or no more than 10 days if time for verification is necessary and there is sufficient reason for instituting a criminal case. To protect their safety, the identity of the witness may be kept confidential from the court until just before the witness is called to testify. According to MOI officials, financial restraints limited the MOI's capacity to implement witness protection programs.

-- I. (SBU) According to the August 2005 edict, Belarusian diplomatic missions and consular sections must field inquiries from Belarusian citizens abroad about legislation to combat trafficking in persons and protect victims in the host country and in Belarus, guarantee full compliance of the host country's laws in relation to the citizens of Belarus, and ensure the return of victims who are Belarusian citizens to their place of residence. The MFA reported that Belarusian Embassy Consular Sections have repatriated several victims from the Gulf States and the Caucasus region in recent years. The MFA included anti-TIP training in its annual consular conference. La Strada was in the process of creating a booklet for Belarusian embassies abroad on anti-TIP legislation, victim identification and the MFA's role in combating TIP. IOM has disseminated information about Belarusian NGOs that assist returned victims of trafficking in Belarus to the MFA, which has in turn passed the information to embassies and consulates in destination countries.

-- J. (SBU) The August 2005 anti-TIP decree ensures victims' safety, social security and rehabilitation care, and requires Belarusian diplomatic missions and consular sections abroad to render necessary assistance to Belarusian victims abroad.

-- K. (SBU) The following international organizations and NGOs work with trafficking victims in Belarus:

-- (SBU) The Young Women's Christian Association of Belarus (BYWCA)/La Strada runs prevention and victim assistance and reintegration programs. The NGO's anti-trafficking efforts include operation and management of Belarus' first toll-free trafficking hotline and a mini-shelter to accommodate victims for short stays. The hotline provides callers with legal information, advice about working abroad and marriage to foreign nationals, review of work contracts, and information about where to seek help if trouble arises. It has received over 15,000 calls since its inception in 2001. The organization also plays a significant role in developing educational materials for distribution through government channels, training government officials, and curriculum development for the MOI's Anti-TIP Academy.

-- (SBU) The International Organization for Migration (IOM) implements a counter trafficking program that addresses prevention, prosecution, and protection. IOM's network of 21 Belarusian NGOs tackling human trafficking and providing assistance to victims have

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helped nearly 1,500 human trafficking victims. IOM runs a preventive program for women living in the regions of Belarus who were most at risk for being victims of trafficking to teach them basic job and job-seeking skills and possibly help them find employment. The organization has run extensive public awareness campaigns throughout Belarus, and in conjunction with the Brest Association of Professional Women operates toll-free information hotline in Brest through funding from the USG and the Swedish Development Agency (SIDA). SIDA also funds IOM law enforcement activities and victim repatriation, and the Department's PRM Bureau funds prevention and protection activities. IOM has excellent relations with the Ministry of the Interior and the State Border Committee.

-- (SBU) Women's Crisis Center "Radislava" opened in 2002 and assists victims of trafficking and domestic violence in Minsk. The Center operates a shelter that provides temporary room and board, and some medical services. As the services were not tailored to specifically assist victims of trafficking, La Strada opened a mini-shelter with Radislava for trafficking victims. The mini-shelter is equipped to accommodate short stays of three to five days for four adults and three children. Radislava reported receiving a newly-renovated building free of charge with free utilities from the authorities in return for an agreement to open a new shelter for victims of trafficking and domestic violence.

-- (SBU) Business Women's Association continues to run its own anti-trafficking hotline in Brest; this hotline began operations in 2002. The city of Brest is the largest crossing point along the Belarusian-Polish border. IOM provided funding for the hotline project and BYWCA implemented training for hotline administrators and counselors. The Association also assists in training seminars in the Brest Region, usually sponsored by IOM or La Strada, and continues to develop contacts across the border in Poland to facilitate anti-trafficking efforts in the region.

-- (SBU) The Red Cross provides preventative information and assistance and victim protection. The organization established five consultation centers throughout Belarus with financial help from the IOM. Each center has an advisory council that consists of Red Cross staff and representatives of local health, education, and law enforcement organization. The organization provides victims with medical, psychological, legal, and material assistance and has programs designed to help victims acquire professional skills and acquire jobs. The Red Cross assisted 234 victims in 2006, and 51 victims in the first six months of 2007.

130. PREVENTION

-- A. (SBU) The government acknowledges that trafficking is a serious problem in Belarus. It recently completed the 2002-2007 State Program of Comprehensive Measures Designed to Combat Trafficking in Persons and the Spread of Prostitution, under which authorities adopted a series of governmental regulations and new legislation. In addition, during 2007, Belarus tabled two draft resolutions at the United Nations General Assembly calling for more effective coordination mechanisms at the international level. Belarus was also active in ensuring that TIP remains on the agenda for the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

-- (SBU) The GOB actively sponsored and participated in international TIP conferences. Together with the government of the Philippines and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Belarus sponsored the International Conference on Trafficking in Women and Girls held at the United Nations in March, 2007. In April, the Ministry of Interior held a conference in Minsk on "International Law Enforcement Cooperation in the Fight Against Trafficking" which was attended by representatives from thirty countries.

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-- (SBU) The government's attention to trafficking issues continued to increase, particularly within the Ministries of Justice,

Interior, and Foreign Affairs. GOB officials demonstrated a better understanding of the nature of trafficking crimes and the importance of protecting victims. The efforts of the central government increased the level of trafficking awareness within regional and local governments.

-- (SBU) The government's latest initiative is the adoption of its new 2008-2010 State Program on Countering Trafficking in Human Beings, Irregular Migration and Related Illicit Activities. This program is aimed at decreasing irregular migration and prostitution, increasing protection and rehabilitation for victims of trafficking, enhancing the efficiency of the state authorities' prevention efforts, further improving TIP-related legislation, and developing cooperation with concerned states and organizations. A major component of the plan will be to create a series of public service announcements to be aired on national and regional television stations. This information campaign will be led by the Ministry of Interior and will receive funding from the Ministry of Information.

-- B. (SBU) State-controlled media outlets continued to increase news coverage of trafficking stories in state newspapers and aired talk shows, television documentaries, and interviews with GOB officials about the problem of trafficking in Belarus. During 2007, ministry officials conducted 14 press conferences and 13 briefings to increase awareness of the problem. The increased media campaign consisted of 61 television and 108 radio spots, and 247 printed articles. The Citizenship and Migration Department conducted its own public awareness campaign on working abroad which included 92 television appearances, 108 radio spots, and 422 printed informational articles.

-- (SBU) In addition, the MOI monitored advertising media for potential TIP recruitment messages. Authorities found 353 potential pitches for prostitution or other illegal work abroad in print and 157 on domestic internet sources. Media monitoring led to 49 administrative charges on promoting prostitution, and six criminal convictions.

-- (SBU) Though in the past IOM complained of long delays in receiving approval for its own anti-TIP television spots, it reported a marked improvement in the approval process in 2007. Three of the four television messages IOM proposed were approved without delay. IOM also reports that its public awareness billboard messages that can be seen throughout Minsk have been provided free of charge by the authorities. Educational materials developed by IOM and La Strada are now displayed and distributed at all land border crossings and at the international airport.

-- (SBU) The Ministry of Interior continues to run a TIP information hotline, though its single goal is to offer information regarding the licensing status and legitimacy of agencies involved in work and study abroad. The Ministry acknowledges that NGO-run hotlines are more effective at providing a broader range of services, and that they refer callers to those hotlines. La Strada and IOM have reported very strong cooperation between the government hotline and their own hotlines in Minsk and Brest. A La Strada official acknowledged that it would be ideal for callers to receive all necessary information in one call, but notes that the government hotline refers all callers to them and that authorities do not hinder or interfere with their work.

-- C. (SBU) IOM mentioned a marked improvement in relations with government entities during the past two years, and several TIP-related NGOs have reported improved relations with authorities during 2007. IOM has reported that securing permissions and approvals for its projects has become much easier during the past year, with approval times and bureaucratic hassles greatly reduced.

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Proposals that formerly required paperwork and a lengthy approval process are now routinely handled immediately with a simple phone call from IOM's head of mission.

-- (SBU) The government has begun to publicly acknowledge the work of local NGOs. In the past, when IOM or other international NGOs submitted proposals for new projects for mandatory registration,

authorities often directed them to eliminate references to local NGO partners. Previously, both IOM and La Strada complained that NGOs and international organizations were not formally recognized as partners in Belarus' fight against TIP. IOM surmised that this is based on the GOB's general mistrust of any kind of non-governmental actors. However, in 2007 authorities began to allow mention of partner NGOs in project proposal paperwork, and the Ministry of Interior now even publicly acknowledges local NGO participation in high-profile projects. In April 2007, the Minister of Interior mentioned the participation of eight local NGOs in a policy speech, a significant step considering that as recently as November 2006 he avoided all references to such NGOs in public addresses. While the authorities are still generally distrustful of NGOs, they have increased cooperation with TIP-specific NGOs and are showing a more open and cooperative attitude.

-- (SBU) The Ministry of Interior regularly covers 20 percent of the cost of conferences sponsored by IOM, amounting to approximately USD 50,000 in 2007, and often also provides transportation, security, and lodging for participants. NGOs have reported close cooperation from authorities in distributing educational materials. Authorities supported distribution of public service announcements produced by the Red Cross and IOM, airing them on state television and on television screens at subway stops free of charge.

-- D. (SBU) According to the MOI, the government has a system to monitor and control various categories of people crossing Belarusian borders. The 2006-2010 State Migration Program created a mechanism of state regulation of migration trends throughout Belarus. Belarus has taken steps to increase border security. Border authorities are currently working on the Bombel Program, a joint project with EC and UNDP designed to raise Belarusian border management to EU standards. Phase one was completed in 2007 and focused on increasing border security, providing training for border guards in EU standard practices, and continuing development of an automated passport system. Phase two is currently under way and is aimed at improving migration control.

-- (SBU) Attention to trafficking detection by Belarus' State Border Committee (SBC) continued to increase due to training by international organizations and attention from the highest levels of government. SBC has increased emphasis on training border guards, sending officers to take part in numerous seminars on counter-trafficking strategies organized in Belarus and abroad. In addition, IOM noted that GOB officials investigate all Belarusians who return from abroad without travel documents. SBC officials have reported several cases where officers were able to identify potential victims at borders and convinced them to turn back.

-- E. (SBU) The MOI is responsible for monitoring the implementation of the government's national strategy to combat trafficking in persons. The MOI leads an inter-agency taskforce, which includes the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare, the State Customs Committee, the State Border Committee, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Information, the Ministry of Culture and the BKGB. In the past, anti-trafficking organizations were often frustrated by a lack of inter-ministerial communication and coordination, as well as the lack of a single point of contact within the government on trafficking issues. However, during 2007, IOM reported that communication with government officials improved.

-- (SBU) In March 2005, the GOB formed a group of government

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officials under the Security Council to implement the President's decree and to improve the efficiency of international programs against human trafficking in Belarus. The group includes officials from the Security Council's State Secretariat, the Office of the Presidential Administration, the Supreme Court, the Council of Ministers, the Committee for State Security (KGB), the State Border Committee, the upper chamber of the National Assembly, and the Foreign, Economic, Health, Justice, Labor, Culture, Information, and Sports Ministries.

-- (SBU) The MOI body responsible for investigating public

corruption is the Office to Combat Organized Crime and Corruption. The State Control Committee also investigates allegations of official corruption through the Interagency Commission for Combating Crime, Corruption and Drug Trafficking. During the past year, there have been no indications of official government involvement in trafficking.

-- (SBU) In order to combat trafficking on a global scale and increase international communication, the GOB sponsored a UNGA resolution recommending the creation of an international coordination mechanism with headquarters in Vienna.

-- F. (SBU) In 2001, the Council of Ministers approved a five-year strategy to combat trafficking in persons and prostitution. The strategy called for the formation of an inter-agency working group to address the trafficking problem and proposed measures for prevention, prosecution, victims' assistance and international cooperation. The government is continuing its efforts with the adoption of its new 2008-2010 State Program on Countering Trafficking in Human Beings, Irregular Migration and Related Illicit Activities. This program is mainly aimed at decreasing irregular migration and prostitution, and increasing protection and rehabilitation of victims of trafficking and further improving TIP legislation. The plan also includes training to enhance the efficiency of prevention efforts improving cooperation between government and non-government entities. Exact budget figures for the implementation of the program are unavailable.

-- (SBU) The government agencies involved in developing the plan include: the Interior, Foreign Affairs, Education, Labor and Social Security, Economic, Health, Justice, Labor, Culture, Information, and Sports Ministries; State Customs Committee; the Prosecutor General's Office; the Committee for State Security (KGB); the State Border Committee; the National Academy of Sciences; the Scientific Research Institute of Criminology, Criminal Analysis and Judicial Experts; Belarusian State Insurance Organization; Belarusian TV/Radio Company; Institution of Social and Political Research under the Office of the Presidential Administration. Prior to enacting this plan, the Ministry of Interior consulted extensively with IOM and its partner NGOs.

-- G. (SBU) As Belarus is not a trafficking or sex tourism destination, it has not conducted awareness campaigns targeting clients of the sex trade, or a campaign that targets those who form the demand for forced labor.

125. HEROES: N/A

126. BEST PRACTICES: The Ministry of Interior's International Anti-TIP Academy is an example of how governments can take the initiative in training their personnel to fight TIP. The Academy's efforts work on two fronts. Not only does it provide training for local law enforcement specialists for each of its police jurisdictions, but it has also completed courses for officers in destination countries. It has already completed training courses for several officials in CIS countries, and is expanding its efforts toward a curriculum for Gulf State destination countries.

12. (U) Embassy point of contact for TIP report: Political Officer

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13. (U) Personnel time spent on this report: Post spent approximately 80 hours preparing the Trafficking in Persons Report.

STEWART